

Ranked Ballots and Ranked Choice Voting

City of Burlington - Engagement and Communications Plan

Background

On June 9, 2016, the Province of Ontario passed legislative amendments to the Municipal Elections Act by way of the Municipal Elections Modernization Act 2016 (MEMA). The MEMA set forth several substantive amendments to the Act, one of which was to provide municipalities the option to offer ranked ballots to electors, which would allow an elector to rank the candidates in their preference. On Sept. 16, 2016, Ontario Regulation 310/16 was introduced which provides further guidance on how ranked ballot elections are to be introduced, approved by local councils and administered throughout the electoral process.

What are Ranked Ballots?

Most municipal elections employ a first past the post methodology when tabulating ballots and declaring an elected candidate. In first past the post elections, customarily, a voter can select one choice per matter. When tabulating the votes, the candidate with the most votes is elected. In a ranked ballot system, voters have the option of selecting up to three candidates, ranking them by preference of their first, second, and third choice. The candidate who achieves the threshold of 50 percent plus one vote is elected. After tabulating the votes, if there is no candidate who meets the determined threshold, then the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. The ballots that selected the eliminated candidate as the first choice are now redistributed to the remaining candidates, this time using those voters' second choice candidate. This process is repeated until a candidate who achieves the 50 percent plus one threshold is determined. Legislation dictates that if a council passes a bylaw it must pertain to both Mayor and Council seats. There cannot be a difference in voting method between the Mayor and Council.

Municipal Experience

During the 2018 municipal election in Ontario there was low uptake on ranked ballot elections. Two municipalities, the City of Kingston and the City of Cambridge, included referendums or questions on their ballots asking electors if they were in favour of ranked choice voting for Mayor and Councillors. In 2018, the City of London in Ontario was the only municipality that used ranked ballots, and their experience is used as a case study for the City of Burlington on the ranked ballot method.

Burlington Approach

Through staff report CL-06-20, Burlington City Council considered how ranked ballots were used during the 2018 Ontario municipal election and sought direction on ranked ballots for the 2022 election.

On Sept. 28, 2020, City Council directed the City Clerk to initiate the process as outlined in Ontario Regulation 310/16 with respect to consultation on ranked ballots, and return to the Corporate Services, Strategy, Risk & Accountability (CSSRA) Committee with a supplemental

report outlining an engagement plan, a proposed timeline, and a consultation budget with an accompanying request for withdrawal from the Elections Reserve. The City Clerk was also directed to keep in mind the need to be representative in the public consultation process.

Project Overview

- On Sept. 28, 2020, Burlington City Council voted to direct the City Clerk to initiate public engagement on ranked ballots for the 2022 municipal election.

Decision Statement

At the beginning of an engagement process, it is helpful to know, “what is the decision to be made?” The decision statement clearly identifies:

- What decision needs to be made?
- Who is the decision-maker?
- When the decision is required?

By May 1, 2021, Burlington City Council is required to pass a bylaw if they would like to introduce ranked ballots in the 2022 municipal election. Prior to passing the bylaw, Council must hold a two-step consultation, as legislated by MEMA:

1. Host an open house to provide information to the public about ranked ballot elections, at least fifteen (15) days before the public meeting and with at least thirty (30) days public notice, and
2. Hold a public meeting to hear feedback from residents, with at least thirty (30) days public notice.

During the consultation, at the open house and the public meeting, Council must make all of the following available to the public:

- information about how ranked ballot elections work, including how the votes are counted
- an estimate of how much ranked ballot elections would cost
- a description of any voting equipment and vote-counting equipment that is being considered for use in the election
- a description of any alternative voting method being considered for use in the election.

Summary of Stakeholders

A stakeholder is anyone who has an interest or concern about a specific topic and therefore any elector in the City of Burlington is deemed a stakeholder. In determining who the stakeholders are for this project, those who have influence or power over the work and those that have an interest in its outcome, they are:

- Residents and resident groups, including adults 55+, newcomers, rural Burlington, young families, millennials and youth
- Community organizations, special interest, advocacy, and activism groups
- Businesses and their groups
- Council Advisory Committees and arms-length city agencies
- Elected officials
- Media
- City staff

Objectives of Engagement

The objectives provide a clear understanding of what the public engagement will strive to achieve through the discussion about ranked ballots and ranked choice voting.

- Ensure electors are aware of the ranked ballot voting system, know how a ranked ballot election works and how much it will cost
- Ensure electors are aware of the engagement opportunities, including dates and times, how their contributions will be considered and how they can access information about ranked ballot elections
- Ensure electors are informed about when and how decisions of Council related to ranked ballots will be made.

Project Milestones and Engagement Level

Timing (WHEN)	Milestone	Message (WHAT)	Stakeholders (WHO)	Level of Engagement
Dec. 2020	Engagement and Communications Plan	Develop the engagement and communications plan	Stakeholders as identified above	Consult
Jan. 14, 2021	Launch Get Involved Burlington project page		Stakeholders as identified above	Inform
Feb. 4 – 25, 2021	Survey to be hosted on Get Involved Burlington	Resident to provide feedback on use of ranked ballots for 2022 election	The survey will be open to registered users of Get Involved Burlington. Only those with a valid Burlington postal code will be considered in the analysis of the survey responses.	Consult

Feb. 17 and 18, 2021	Virtual Open Houses (3 open houses over the course of 2 days)		Stakeholders as identified	Consult
March 22, 2021	Public Meeting – hosted by Corporate Services, Strategy, Risk and Accountability (CSSRA) Committee		Stakeholders as identified	Consult
April 8, 2021	Council decision		Stakeholders as identified	Inform
April 2021	Outreach of Council decision		Stakeholders as identified	Inform

Policies and Factors That Cannot be Influenced

- The Regional Chair for the Halton Region Council will continue to be directly elected using the first past the post electoral system. In accordance with legislation, ranked ballots must be selected by all lower tier municipalities for the Regional Chair to be placed on the ballot as a ranked choice. At this time, none of the lower tier municipal units in Halton Region have resolved to implement ranked ballots for the 2022 election.
- Candidates for school board trustee would still be elected using the first past the post electoral system.
- The voting methods (i.e. internet, paper ballot, telephone and mail) and equipment (optical scan tabulators) are determined by Council and not subject to the engagement.

Forms of Involvement and Communication to the Public

Timing (WHEN)	Milestone	Form of Involvement	Form of Communication
Jan. 14, 2021	Open House: Public Notice	Consult	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. City Update ad 2. Social media, including Twitter, Instagram posts and stories, and Facebook posts and events 3. Media release 4. Web page with dedicated, friendly URL, e.g. burlington.ca/ranked ballots 5. Slider on homepage of burlington.ca 6. Content for Councillor e-newsletters 7. Get Involved e-newsletter 8. City calendar 9. Utilize local youth and multicultural groups to share messaging

			10. Video to explain ranked ballot system 11. Infographics to explain ranked ballot system
Feb. 4 – 25, 2021	Promotion of survey on ranked ballots on Get Involved Burlington		1. City Update ad 2. Online Metroland ads 3. Social media, including Twitter, Instagram posts and stories, and Facebook posts and events 4. Media release 5. Slider on homepage of burlington.ca 6. Content for Councillor e-newsletters 7. Get Involved e-newsletter 8. City calendar 9. Printed communication sent by direct mail 10. Translation of communications materials into top 5 languages spoken in Burlington 11. Utilize local youth and multicultural groups to share messaging 12. Video to explain ranked ballots 13. Infographics to explain ranked ballot system
Feb. 17 and 18, 2021	Virtual Open Houses (3 open houses over the course of 2 days)	Consult	
Feb. 18, 2021	Public Meeting: Public Notice		1. City Update ad 2. Social media 3. Web content
March 12, 2021	Report and Agenda for Public Meeting published		1. Media release – thank you for taking part in survey, and next steps. 2. Social media posts
March 22, 2021	Public meeting hosted by Corporate Services, Strategy, Risk and Accountability (CSSRA) Committee	Inform and Consult	3. Web content 4. City calendar 5. Get Involved newsletter
March 26, 2021	Corporate Services, Strategy, Risk and Accountability (CSSRA) Committee agenda published with ranked ballots report		1. Social media 2. Web content
April 8, 2021	Corporate Services, Strategy, Risk and Accountability (CSSRA) Committee Meeting – recommendation on ranked ballots		1. Media release 2. Social media, including Twitter, Instagram posts and stories, and Facebook posts and events 3. Slider on homepage of burlington.ca

April 20, 2021	Council Meeting to approve by-law (deadline of May 1, 2021)		4. Content for Councillor e-newsletters 5. Get Involved e-newsletter 6. City calendar 7. Video to explain ranked ballots 8. Infographics to explain ranked ballot system
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How the City Will Collect and Respond to Feedback

Get Involved Burlington is the City's engagement portal. The City will host a survey on getinvolvedburlington.ca where residents will be able to submit their feedback on ranked ballots. The survey will be open to those registered or who register to the Get Involved Burlington engagement portal and have a valid Burlington postal code and will only be allowed to complete the survey once. Non-Burlington postal codes will not be included in the results.

The City will inform residents with the following disclaimer at the start of the survey:

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. Personal information, as defined by Section 2 of the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA) is collected under the authority of the Municipal Act. Individual responses will be kept confidential and will be used to help develop the policy on use of ranked ballots for the City of Burlington. Non-identifiable summaries of responses may be developed and shared publicly. For questions regarding the collection, use and disclosure of this information please contact amanda.fusco@burlington.ca

Evaluating the Public Engagement Process

To assist in measuring how the public participation contributed to the project decision to be made, the following will be used to evaluate the public participation process.

1. Once project is complete, measure the degree to which community members felt they:

- a) Understood the project's process and its limitations
- b) Understood how the feedback they provided influenced the outcome

2. Evaluate each form of engagement.

How did each of the engagement approaches used help to achieve the engagement objectives?

3. Analyze how the feedback received about the forms of engagement impacted the overall public participation process as the project moved forward.

Project Overview

Timing	Milestone	Roles & Responsibilities
Dec. 2020	Develop creative and communications materials	Communications staff
Jan. 14, 2021	Get Involved Burlington project page	Engagement staff
Jan. 14, 2021	Open House – Public Notice	Communications staff
January or February 2021	Presentations to Advisory Committees	Clerks staff
Feb. 4 – 25, 2021	Host survey on ranked ballots	Engagement staff
Feb. 17 and 18, 2021	Open House – Virtual	Clerks staff
Feb. 18, 2021	Public Meeting – Public Notice	Communications staff
March 12, 2021	Report and Agenda for Public Meeting	Clerks staff
March 22, 2021	Public Meeting hosted by CSSRA	Clerks staff
March 26, 2021	CSSRA Agenda published with ranked ballots report	Clerks staff
April 8, 2021	CSSRA Meeting – recommendation on ranked ballots	Clerks staff
April 20, 2021	Council Meeting – approval of by-law (deadline is May 1, 2021)	Clerks staff

Budget Overview

Item	Details	Cost
City Update ad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full page ad • Half page ad 	\$1,300 (full) \$650 (half)
Consultant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host 3 virtual open houses • Public meeting • Facilitate/writing of the report 	\$5,000 – \$7,000 per session
Direct mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postcard • Brochure 	\$10,000 – \$15,000
Halton Multicultural Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey and survey responses translation into top 5 languages in Halton 	\$900 per language
Online ad's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inside Halton – Burlington Post 	\$800
Social Media boosts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate social media channels 	\$500
Video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotional video on what is ranked ballots 	\$3,500